

Message Text

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PAGE 01 LONDON 01570 281645Z
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INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 CIAE-00 H-02 INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05
PA-02 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-15 ACDA-10 MC-02 EB-08
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ARA-10 NEA-10 /125 W
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SECDEF WASHDC
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TAGS: UK, MASS
SUBJECT: ARMS TRANSFER POLICY

REF: STATE 17333

SUMMARY. DAVID FAIRHALL, DEFENSE CORRESPONDENT FOR THE GUARDIAN, NOTES THAT A US INITIATIVE TO SUCCESSFULLY CONTROL WESTERN ARMS SALES TO THE THIRD WORLD IS VIEWED WITH CONSIDERABLE SKEPTICISM "BOTH BY MANUFACTURERS INVOLVED IN THE TRADE AND BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR INTERPRETING WHAT BRITISH POLICY THERE ALREADY IS." END SUMMARY.

WE QUOTE FAIRHALL ARTICLE, WHICH APPEARS IN 28 JANUARY ISSUE OF THE GUARDIAN, UNDER TITLE "DOUBTS ON ARMS SALES CURBS," IN FULL.

QUOTE. THE PROSPECT OF A SUCCESSFUL US INITIATIVE TO CONTROL WESTERN ARMS SALES TO THE THIRD WORLD FOLLOWING VICE-PRESIDENT MONDALE'S VISIT WAS VIEWED WITH UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 02 LONDON 01570 281645Z

CONSIDERABLE SCEPTICISM YESTERDAY, BOTH BY MANUFACTURERS INVOLVED IN THE TRADE AND BY GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS RESPONSIBLE FOR INTERPRETING WHAT BRITISH POLICY THERE ALREADY IS. 'I'LL BELIEVE IT WHEN I SEE IT,' WAS A TYPICAL COMMENT.

BRITAIN'S 'DEFENCE' EXPORTS, AS THEY ARE EUPHEMISTICALLY CALLED, ARE RUNNING AT ABOUT POUNDS 700

MILLIONS A YEAR, HAVING RISEN TO THAT LEVEL FROM POUNDS 150 MILLIONS 10 YEARS AGO. THAT REPRESENTS A LOT OF JOBS -- A POWERFUL ARGUMENT FOR NOT INTERFERING WITH THE TRADE, JUST AS IT HAS INCREASINGLY BECOME A STRONG REASON FOR NOT MAKING THE FURTHER DEFENSE EXPENDITURE CUTS SOME MEMBERS OF THE LABOUR ADMINISTRATION WOULD LIKE TO SEE.

THE NEXT POINT THAT WILL INEVITABLY BE MADE IN SUPPORT OF CONTINUED EXPORTS IS THAT, TO BE EFFECTIVE, A POLICY OF RESTRAINT WOULD HAVE TO BE AGREED WITH THE FRENCH -- AND THE LENGTHS TO WHICH FRANCE IS PREPARED TO GO TO SECURE HER SUPPLY OF OIL HAS JUST BEEN DEMONSTRATED BY THE HASTY RELEASE OF THE SUSPECTED ARAB TERRORIST, ABU DAOUD.

AND IF THE WESTERN SUPPLIERS ALL HOLD BACK IN THE MIDDLE EAST, IT WILL BE ARGUED, IT WILL SIMPLY REOPEN OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE SOVIET UNION.

IN THE PAST, BRITAIN'S POLICY ON ARMS SALES UNDER A LABOUR GOVERNMENT HAS FALLEN INTO THREE PARTS: AN IDEOLOGICAL EMBARGO ON SALES TO COUNTRIES SUCH AS SOUTH AFRICA AND CHILE (THOUGH WITH MANY LOOPHOLES), A VAGUE CONCEPT OF MAINTAINING THE MILITARY "BALANCE" IN AREAS SUCH AS THE MIDDLE EAST (NOW THE ISRAELIS ARE GETTING THE AMERICAN F15 FIGHTER, FOR EXAMPLE, IT SEEMS THE ARABS CAN HAVE THE JAGUAR LOW-LEVEL BOMBER IF THEY WANT IT), AND AN EAGERNESS TO EXPLOIT TO THE FULL OIL-RICH MARKETS SUCH AS THE IRANIAN FORCES, WHICH ARE NOT EXPECTED TO BE INVOLVED IN IMMEDIATE CONFLICT. THERE WILL BE A LOT OF SYMPATHY WITH AMERICAN UNCLASSIFIED

UNCLASSIFIED

PAGE 03 LONDON 01570 281645Z

CONCERN TO REDUCE THE GENERAL LEVEL OF THIS TRADE, PROVIDED THERE IS AN OBVIOUS ECONOMIC ALTERNATIVE. THE MOST LIKELY -- BUT ONLY IN THE CONTEXT OF SPECIFIC DEALS, WHICH MIGHT INCLUDE ANTI-AIRCRAFT MISSILES OR TANK GUNS -- WOULD BE WHERE THE PENTAGON SHOWED ITS READINESS TO MAKE MORE USE OF THE "TWO-WAY STREET" ACROSS THE NORTH ATLANTIC WHICH IS NOW SUPPOSED TO BE STANDARDISING NATO'S WEAPONS PROCUREMENT.

IF IT WERE A QUESTION OF PRESIDENT CARTER'S ADMINISTRATION TWISTING ITS ALLY'S ARM, THERE ARE MANY WAYS IN WHICH IT COULD BE DONE, FOR EXAMPLE BY GETTING TOUGH ABOUT THE RE-EXPORT OF THE MANY AMERICAN COMPONENTS IN BRITISH MILITARY EQUIPMENT. BUT US MANUFACTURERS WOULD PROBABLY JOIN FORCES WITH THEIR BRITISH COUNTERPARTS TO RESIST SUCH TACTICS, BECAUSE THEY WOULD INVITE RETALIATION THAT -- IN SPECIFIC INSTANCES -- COULD DAMAGE THEIR OWN PROGRAMMES. END QUOTE.

ARMSTRONG

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Message Attributes

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Decaption Note:
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Disposition Approved on Date:
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